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## Grandmother Armstrong

Donna Emerson

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# Grandmother Armstrong

by Donna Emerson

was what I wanted our mothers to be.  
Chiseled English features,  
on a soft-as-powder face.  
White hair in its eighties  
upswept into a chignon,  
hands quiet, a still body,  
calm as an Alabama day without wind.

Though her eyes had gone out,  
she understood without many words  
what was true.

She understood my struggle with you  
without my speaking of it.  
She asked me to read C. P. Snow's books  
about scientists. I read them all,  
trying to grasp the analytical mind of one  
who dreams up theories, fine-tunes the spectrometer,  
measures in the middle of the night, sifts  
data about the rare and noble gases.

The one thing she couldn't see:  
I had no trouble with you, the scientist.  
It was your undiscerning animal instincts that  
I tripped over until I had to go.  
Your eyes grasping, your unzipped pants.

When I sat in her room, cosseted,  
air damp enough to require fans in our hands,  
I read books to her. We listened to readers  
on long-playing records from Louisville.  
We talked about cotton.

